

Testimony on Senate Bill 2407

Senator Jamie Selzler | District 44, Fargo

Joint Appropriations Committee | September 2, 2026

Proposed Amendment: LC 25.1421.02005

Co-Chairs Bekkedahl and Vigesaa, members of the Joint Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

For those of you I have not had the chance to meet yet, my name is Jamie Selzler. I am the State Senator representing District 44 in Fargo.

I am new to the Senate, but my background is in business. Before coming here, I spent more than two decades in senior leadership and executive roles at some of the largest companies in the world. I have led organizations with thousands of employees, managed budgets in the eight and nine figures, and been involved with building projects of this size from the original vision through construction and the punch-out list at the end.

I mention that because it shapes how I look at the problem in front of us.

I am not here to assign blame. There will be plenty of time in the future to understand how we got here and what lessons should be learned.

Today, we have a more immediate problem.

We have a partially constructed building. We have North Dakota businesses that need to be paid for work they have already performed. We have a substantial state investment that needs to be protected from a North Dakota winter. And we have a financing plan that has not worked the way it was intended to work.

I also want to recognize Senator Hogue and the other sponsors of SB 2407. They were handed an extraordinarily difficult situation. Doing nothing is not acceptable, and they have put forward a serious attempt to find a path forward where there are no perfect choices.

My concern is the amount of additional financial risk the state would be accepting.

This project was designed around approximately \$39 million in private fundraising. After roughly two years and eight months, approximately \$4.5 million has been raised or pledged toward that goal.

We have to be realistic about what that tells us.

I hope the fundraising campaign becomes enormously successful. But I do not think we can make an appropriation decision based on the assumption that tens of millions of dollars will materialize when the evidence we have today does not demonstrate that.

The bill before us authorizes another \$35 million line of credit through the Bank of North Dakota. The intention is that private donations repay that line.

But if those donations do not materialize, the Historical Society is directed to come back to the 2029 Legislature and request a deficiency appropriation for the remaining balance and accrued interest.

That does not mean taxpayers will necessarily pay the entire \$35 million. But from a risk-management standpoint, I believe we should treat every dollar we authorize as a dollar the state may ultimately have to repay.

I also want to address directly one of the strongest arguments that has been made for continuing construction.

Testimony cites an estimate of approximately \$1.7 million in additional costs if there is no funding before January 1, including a temporary roof, heating, insurance, general conditions, demobilization and remobilization.

Those are real costs.

But the alternative I am proposing is not to provide no funding.

I am proposing that we pay what we legitimately owe, protect what taxpayers have already paid to build, and then stop long enough to determine what project makes financial sense from this point forward.

That is why I am asking the committee to consider amendment LC 25.1421.02005.

First, instead of authorizing a \$35 million line of credit to continue the existing construction project, the amendment reduces that line to \$6 million and limits its use to costs already incurred and the work necessary to stabilize and weatherproof the site.

I would suggest one change to my own amendment.

If a member of this committee is willing to move it, I would ask that the \$6 million figure be increased to \$8 million.

The most recent public figure I have seen puts outstanding invoices at nearly \$4.5 million. We also have the approximately \$1.7 million estimate associated with protecting the project while construction is paused.

I want to make sure the businesses that performed work are made whole and that OMB has enough room to properly protect the state's investment. If more precise numbers are provided today, I am certainly open to using those numbers.

The principle is simple:

Pay what we owe. Protect what we have already built. But do not authorize tens of millions of additional dollars before we decide what this project should now become.

Second, the amendment addresses the \$15 million previously appropriated from the Strategic Investment and Improvements Fund.

That money remains unavailable because the project did not reach the private fundraising threshold established by the Legislature.

Under this amendment, if that funding becomes available, it may be used only to repay lines of credit obtained for the project. It cannot simply become another source of money to restart construction under the existing plan.

Third, the amendment keeps the oversight structure contained in the bill. The Capital Grounds Planning Commission would continue to have final decision-making authority, working with the State Historical Society, the Adjutant General and OMB.

What changes is the assignment we give them.

They would be required to come back to the 70th Legislative Assembly with a revised project plan.

That plan must substantially reduce the remaining capital cost and the state's financial exposure. It must maximize the practical and economical use of construction and materials already completed or acquired. And it must prioritize the core functions of a North Dakota military museum.

We are not the experts on how to design a museum. But we are responsible for setting the financial boundaries.

So I am asking them to start with what exists today.

Look at what has already been built and purchased. Look at the commitments we have already made. Then ask:

Given what we already have, what is the most practical and economical way to turn it into a military museum that accomplishes the core mission and that North Dakota's veterans can be proud of?

That is different from asking how we find enough money to finish everything that was originally planned.

Finally, the amendment makes the pause meaningful.

Except for stabilization and weatherproofing, construction may not resume until the 70th Legislative Assembly approves the revised project plan and specifically authorizes construction to continue.

That allows us to come back during the regular session with better information about the remaining cost, the private funding actually available, what can be reduced or eliminated, and what the next dollar of state money will actually buy.

There are legitimate concerns about the cost of pausing. But the Attorney General negotiated important protections into the state's construction agreements, including the ability to terminate for convenience and the removal of the normal lost-profit provision for unfinished work.

There are risks on both sides.

I believe spending some money now to satisfy our obligations and protect the site for several months is a risk we can understand and manage.

Authorizing another \$35 million of state-backed borrowing based on a private fundraising assumption that has not materialized is a much larger risk.

Many of us may feel as though we have been painted into a corner by this project.

But we are not powerless.

The Legislature controls the purse strings, and we have a responsibility to North Dakotans to use their money wisely.

And I want to be clear: this is not about whether someone supports our military or our veterans.

North Dakota has an extraordinary military history. The men and women from this state who have served our country deserve to have that history preserved and told.

We will build something they can be proud of.

The question is how we get there responsibly.

I believe LC 25.1421.02005, with the line of credit increased from \$6 million to \$8 million, gives us a pragmatic, fiscally responsible and conservative path forward.

It pays what we owe. It protects what we have built. It requires a less expensive plan with less financial exposure to the state. And it brings that plan back to the Legislature before construction begins again.

I respectfully ask a member of this committee to move the amendment.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.